

Fourth Sunday after the Pentecost
July 3, 2022
Southampton, MA

Scripture: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Jesus sent seventy-two people to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near to every town and place he intended to go. They went in pairs. Twelve disciples made six pairs. Who would have been among the other thirty pairs? Luke didn't say.

We know women followed Jesus and the disciples. Luke named some of them: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and "...many others, who provided for them out of their resources." (Luke 8:3b) Plus, women played significant roles throughout Jesus' life and ministry. The Syrophenician woman taught him that his ministry included Gentiles. Although the men fled, the women remained at the foot of the cross. Women were the first to see the empty tomb and tell of his Resurrection. Some believe the unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus was a woman. As Jesus drew from the people following him, women would have been likely candidates as well.

However, by not mentioning them, Luke silenced them. We shouldn't be surprised. First Century Palestine was a patriarchal society where women were subservient to men. The gospels shone a bright light upon the men and their ongoing activities and interactions with Jesus and the people. The women, however, worked hard in the shadows.

As women in a patriarchal society, they likely had a different perspective on Jesus' ministry and teachings than the men. Their lives were different. Their stories were different. Their telling, then, would likely have different emphases. It might have sounded something like this:

We have been following Jesus of Nazareth for the past two or three years. His teachings are compelling because he has a vision for a life-giving world, which is different from this world. It's different in so many ways that I'm still learning how to explain it.

He often told us about his mother who said that the powerful will be toppled from their thrones, the rich will go away empty, and the poor will be fed. I remember asking him if it meant that God favors the poor. He said that God favors the poor, but not at the expense of people who are rich.

He clarified it by saying that bringing down the rich and powerful did not mean that the poor and oppressed will rule in their place. This is the part that I'm still trying to understand. There is no hierarchy. No one or group rules over another. Life isn't a zero-sum game. It isn't about winning versus losing. Everyone wins when everyone has their daily bread. Everyone wins when everyone can flourish. Conversely, everyone loses when anyone suffers from scarcity or deprivation. Everyone loses when anyone is deprived of their fullest human potential.

He taught us that real leadership is servanthood... that when we lead, we lead as servants. Authority, then, is not gained through power, but through lifting up others in love. I know this is hard to wrap your head around. I know it is for me.

Fundamentally, this life-giving world rests upon how we relate to each other. Men and women have the same status. We're traveling together literally as Jesus' disciples and figuratively through life itself. As women, we support him and the men with our resources. In turn, they look out for us. Jesus listens to us as much as he listens to the men. He listens to our stories and learns from them. He told us of a time when he was either in Tyre or Sidon, I can't remember which, when a Syrophenician woman taught him that his ministry was also for Gentiles.

Though he spoke about God as his father, he also spoke about Wisdom as a woman, who was present before time began. He told us that God created Wisdom at the beginning of creation before springs had water and mountains had shape. (Proverbs 8:22a, 24b, 25a) It's not like there's two gods, but that all of who God is is not just a man. I don't know if that makes sense or not. As I said, I'm still learning. What I know, though, is women are not subservient to men. We are equals in the eyes of God.

Jesus reminded us that true peace is freedom to flourish and to live to one's fullest potential. When men make decisions for women, their decisions can limit our possibilities. Life is difficult enough with our roles as mothers and caregivers, which seem never-ending. Not that I object to those roles, but when men make decisions that impact our lives, they increase our burdens. That's why Jesus' listening and then having our stories reflected in his teachings mean so much to us.

Jesus talked about salvation in this world, which comes when we overturn this world's values and assumptions. Take wealth. Jesus reminded us that wealth is not about having property or money. We're wealthy by how much we give away not how much we have. He taught that the last shall be first and the first shall be last, which points to humility as fundamental to strong community. Salvation, then, is shalom, the wholeness of life, where love is the foundation for a world where God's peace and justice prevail.

Shalom comes when we understand that love is an action, not an emotion. He taught us that God's will is for us to have a life here on this earth as it is in heaven. That means kindness, compassion, gratitude, and generosity should be constants in our lives. Furthermore, healthy relationships and a healthy community require a good dose of empathy. Yet, he also reminded us that we cannot avoid messing up as in we get angry or become vindictive or that greed takes

over. Then, restoring shalom means forgiveness and reconciliation. He taught us that the opposite of love is not hate, but fear.

As women, we are the property of our fathers, and when we marry, our husbands. The only rights we have are those that our fathers or husbands give us. Jesus reminded everyone that we must be cared for. He often emphasized that the Torah commands us to take care of the widows and the orphans, and that our rights are not defined by the men in our lives, but by God as in the law. Though the law makes us the property of our fathers and husbands, the law ultimately says that all people, men and women, must have human dignity and respect. Men and women should be equal in their abilities to use what they have in service to God, which we see in the way Jesus treats all of us. God needs every one of us, women and men, to make God's kingdom here on earth. All of us can be prophetic. All of us can be servant leaders. All of us can be caregivers. All of us can be healers. All of us can be teachers. These roles are not limited to men or to women. Jesus doesn't restrict us to being only child-bearers and caregivers. We are free to take responsibility to further Jesus' teachings, which is why I'm talking to you now. In fact, it's not only our responsibility, it is our obligation.

Women experience this world differently from men. Without listening to women's stories and how we experience this world, this world will never become heaven on earth. Our experiences should become part of the whole fabric of our shared communal life, which will enrich all our lives, strengthen our communities, and grant us all eternal life.